

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE QUALITY LABEL FOR YOUTH CENTRES

Role, value and impact of youth centres



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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PREFACE

More than 10 years ago, the process of implementing a Council of Europe quality label for youth centres started, and today about 20 centres have joined this initiative. Since the beginning, a recurring demand by the participating centres has been to have a common understanding of what they stand for, what they should deliver and what their potential impact for society is. The present text is an answer to these questions. It complements the brochure with the Quality Label criteria, and is, in part, a programmatic framework for these youth centres.

This document describes these youth centres' function and their potential contribution to youth work. Such a document describing general objectives, features and approaches helps the staff of the centres to understand their mission better, to situate their work and it also contributes to its validation. Furthermore, having a common understanding of what should be achieved is part of quality development, as outputs can be compared to agreed goals.

Having a common vision allows for the creation of an identity for youth centres which are part of a network. Having a description of the contribution of youth centres to the youth sector makes it easier to participate in the debate around the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work¹. Such a programmatic framework, accepted by all the centres participating in the Quality Label initiative, and approved by the Council of Europe, contributes to the recognition and validation of the efforts of the youth centres.

Each labelled youth centre has its very own context, opportunities and limitations which determine its priorities and how it adapts to the criteria of the Council of Europe Quality Label. However, a common feature of the labelled centres is the will to achieve the following goals:

- be a safe space for young people
- be educational establishments
- be multipliers in youth work
- be focal points for networking
- promote values, approaches and standards of the Council of Europe.

Not every centre achieves the same results to the same level in each field. However, all of them had reached a certain minimum in every field when they acquired the label, all of them strive to develop further in every field, and all of them are committed to innovation.

The following text is designed to be used, partially or integrally, by the labelled youth centres, and those that wish to acquire the label, in their communication with decision makers at a local, regional or national level. As those people are not always specialists in youth work or familiar with the Council of Europe's strategies, the text is deliberately written in a reader- and user-friendly way.

¹ "Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work"

INTRODUCTION

History of Youth Centres

Every activity needs its own infrastructure: art needs museums, theatres or concert halls, education needs schools, religion needs churches, mosques, synagogues or temples, and so on. The same is true for youth work.

The first permanent youth hostel opened in 1912 in Germany with the aim of allowing poor city youngsters to breathe fresh air and enjoy outdoor activities. At around that time, youth movements were starting to create their own youth centres in order to be able to organise activities independently. These places allow young people to meet and to exchange ideas and information, but they are also used for training courses for young leaders. A *Times* journalist once entitled an article, ‘Buildings are where we store our memories’ and, along with this idea, the centres also have an important emotional and symbolic value for the organisations and their members.

In the 1960s and 1970s residential youth centres, which were often initiated by public authorities, emerged across Europe. They were a result of the increased focus of politics in youth issues during that period. These centres had various backgrounds and priorities, depending mostly on the original motivation of the authorities to establish them. Some of them were only residential facilities without their own programme, but offering support to organise youth activities, training courses or seminars. Others had an educational offer, often with a thematic focus such as civic education, ecology, arts, or sports. The common

idea of these centres was to offer space to youth groups who did not have their own infrastructure.

European Youth Centres of the Council of Europe

The two European Youth Centres of the Council of Europe are the result of a similar process. Their aim is to “be an educational establishment of the Council of Europe and a knowledge base on Youth Affairs, in particular Youth Policy and Youth Work, as well as emerging youth phenomena. As an instrument for the participation of European Youth in the building of Europe it shall contribute to implementing the youth activities programme of the Council of Europe” (from the statute of the European Youth Centres).

Thus the European Youth centres in Strasbourg and Budapest combine in one place different features that could also be organised separately: they offer residential facilities for youth groups (“a space for young people”), they have educational programmes and develop educational practice (“educational establishments”), they share their knowledge and know-how (“multipliers in youth work”) and they are platforms where people from different horizons of youth work meet (“focal points for networking”). These four aspects collected under one roof has resulted in the development of these centres as backbones of youth work and the youth policy of the Council of Europe.

Quality Label for Youth Centres Programme

Several youth centres across Europe wanted to be associated with the Council of Europe and its youth sector, and in 2008 the “Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres” as a standard-setting instrument was established. The labelled centres have a mandate from public authorities, are willing to engage in international co-operation, and also share and promote the values of the Council of Europe. The criteria and procedures for acquiring the Label are described in detail in a brochure. Currently, about 20 centres actively participate in the network established within the framework of the Quality Label. The Quality Label also comprises an annual platform meeting and an annual training course, both of which aim at knowledge sharing and co-operation between the staff of these residential youth centres.

Why Youth Centres?

Today the public services in general, and youth centres in particular, are under financial pressure. The enthusiasm of the founding years of youth centres seems to have somewhat faded and increasingly public authorities ask management to justify the added value of the youth centres for society. Unfortunately, the youth centres are operating in a very specific field, making this exercise particularly challenging. Their users, the youth organisations and other youth groups, are certainly allies to the centres, but they are not a homogenous group, and are not always able to provide a strong lobby for them. The recognition of the value of a strong civil society, and in particular of a living youth civil society, also varies from country to country. Another weakness of the youth centres is that their educational work is mostly in the field of non-formal

education, which has not been well recognised up to now.

The Council of Europe is aware of the impact of the economic crisis on youth work provision in some member states and, in response, has recently adopted a recommendation encouraging member states to develop and strengthen youth work policies and practice¹. It invites the member States to “provide an enabling environment and conditions for both proven and innovative youth work practices”. Youth centres are part of such an enabling environment and the text recommends that governments of the member states “renew their support for youth work by promoting the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres as an example of good practice”.

The aim of this text is to describe what centres awarded with the Council of Europe Quality Label for youth centres represent, to situate their contribution within the field of youth work, and to illustrate their added value to the youth sector. This text was developed in consultation with the labelled youth centres. However, it is important to mention that the group of labelled centres is not a closed circle: youth centres willing to apply for the Quality Label are always welcome.

¹ “Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work”



QL-YOUTH CENTRES: A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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QL-Youth centres are a proof that society acknowledges the need for young people to have their own places and autonomy. This physical space is a concrete sign of the confidence in the young and in youth organisations. Therefore, the QL-Youth centres help young people acquire a sense of belonging to society.

Facilities for residential activities by and with young people

Residential activities organised by associations or movements are valuable for its participants for many different reasons. For many young people, it is a new and adventurous experience to be away from home and from parental control for more than a day. It is sometimes their first experience of autonomy, and one which is not forgotten during their lifetime. The positive experiences made by the participants create an emotional relationship to the place and to what it stands for.

Another significant contribution residential activities make to the overall development of young people is in the formation and maintenance of relationships. A key factor is time, as the number of hours spent in personal contact during a residential activity is significant. More time can be spent in teamwork situations or focused activities. Even the informal time can have a quality about it. This allows participants to develop a level and depth of relationship which cannot be reached during day-time activities.

Being a part of these activities is also an opportunity to understand what it means to live together in a group of peers, and that co-operation is a key to successful projects. For those who are, to whatever extent, involved in the planning of the activities, it is a very effective way to experience designing activities, participating in decision-making processes and taking responsibility.

The organisers of residential activities need appropriate facilities and working conditions. This means not only having the capacity to provide board and lodging, but also to have space for different formats of group activities and interactive methodology activities. In addition, the management and staff need to have a positive, supportive and considerate attitude towards the youth activities. QL-Youth centres offer such facilities.

Space for youth organisations

Youth organisations play an important role in the participation of young people in society. They make an important contribution to active citizenship by providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical thinking for civic engagement and social action. As actors of civil society, they allow young people to have their voice heard and to participate in the public debate.

Youth organisations need space for their self-organised activities; these can include residential activities for their members, training courses for their leaders and multipliers,

or seminars. In larger countries, national organisations need residential facilities for their co-ordination meetings.

Very often, larger organisations run their own facilities, but most youth NGOs do not have these possibilities. This is why we need centres which offer affordable physical space, and where the freedom and autonomy of the non-governmental organisations are respected. Public authorities have recognised this need, and for many QL-Youth centres, the aim of offering affordable space to organisations was one of the original reasons for their creation.

Space for autonomy

Young people need places where they can be young. They need spaces where they can feel safe and free to test new activities, exchange ideas, gain experience and live interaction. Shared responsibility and self-determination are both objectives and features of youth work. As much as possible, the ideas and initiatives of the young are supported and decisions are taken jointly with them. The involvement of children and young people in decision-making processes promotes democratic consciousness and commitment.

The experience of autonomy is an important feature of youth work. With this in mind, it is important that the group can claim and appropriate space. This means that – for the duration of the activity and within certain limits – the group can consider the rented space as its own and make creative use of it, and thus create opportunities to experience and experiment with autonomy. This is an essential aspect in youth work and a key element to the success of the activities. The fact that infrastructures are entrusted to youth groups, albeit for a limited time, contributes to the empowerment of the young.

This tolerance and flexibility is not possible in facilities that are not designed for such a use or where the staff has no understanding

of the special needs of youth groups. Therefore, QL-Youth centres have a specific role to play in youth work.

” QL-Youth centres, through their design, support by the staff and their approach, offer adequate space for the specific needs of young people.

” QL-Youth centres mark biographies, make memories and build bonds between people.

” QL-Youth centres, with flexible facilities and staff, are a support to youth organisations.

Related criteria:

-
- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Criterion 1: | The centre has, as its primary mission, the aim to serve the youth sector and young people. |
| Criterion 5: | The centre has accommodation facilities within one campus alongside the working facilities. |
| Criterion 6: | The centre offers a tolerant and safe working environment respectful of diversity and human dignity. |
| Criterion 7: | The centre offers appropriate working conditions for activities of the youth sector. |
| Criterion 15: | The centre is service- and client-orientated. |



QL-YOUTH CENTRES: EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

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QL-Youth centres offer educational programmes. Depending on their context, these address youth groups, youth organisations, school classes or individuals

Educational offers for youth groups

Even if youth groups usually organise their own activities, with their own leaders and following their own priorities, they also occasionally include educational offers by external establishments. In fact, most of them need this additional input in order to complete and enrich their programmes. They demand specific activities or courses arranged by educational specialists. The demand covers very diverse fields, such as arts, creativity, the environment, sports or civic education.

There is also a demand for outdoor education activities, team-building, activities related to social skills and values, or leadership training. QL-Youth centres, with a focus on non-formal education, have offers which can rarely be found elsewhere, particularly in these areas.

Educational offers for school groups

Schools complete their curricula with non-formal activities which can be, for example, theatre projects, music events, or sports competitions. Teachers know that educational offers outside the regular school classes not only allow for a break in the routine, but also have both a cognitive and an emotional impact.

Certain extra-curricular activities cannot be arranged within the usual school setting or even inside school buildings. This is particularly true for activities in the field of interpersonal relations and values, where the hierarchical position of a teacher does not allow the person in question to have the same approach as an external trainer, who works with the group for a limited time. Furthermore, leaving the school building is an opportunity for teachers to see their class in a different context and discover other qualities of the students. QL-Youth centres with their own educational offer can respond to a strong demand by schools.

Educational offers for individuals

Not every educational topic can be addressed by the school system. The reasons for this are multiple: for example, the timeframe may be limited, the school curricula are not easily adaptable to very specific needs, and the teachers are not specialists in every field. Public authorities often rely on non-formal educational structures, and sometimes on youth centres, when it comes to educational programmes in the fields of prevention (e.g. health, risk behaviour), awareness raising (e.g. nature protection, environmental problems) or human rights.

Non-formal education becomes more important as other structures, such as schools or families, are sometimes overburdened with societal changes

and are not able to cater for all the situations young people are faced with. This results in an increased demand on youth work to engage with specific target groups. Some QL-Youth centres work, for example, with young people who have left the school system prematurely, and give them an opportunity to identify options within adult life or to develop skills. Others focus on young people from socially disadvantaged settings, minorities or young refugees, and offer them space to gain experience and knowledge.

Innovation in non-formal education

Even if non-formal education has been practised for decades by youth organisations, various institutions, and civil society at large, its recognition as an important pillar of learning is quite recent. For example, the definition given by UNESCO, which is nowadays broadly accepted and used, dates only from 1998 and the earliest Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on non-formal education is from the year 2000². It is a domain which is still under major development.

It is also necessary to develop educational practice and tools through experimentation with new approaches, methods and activities: QL-Youth centres are laboratories for the development of non-formal education.

The increased interest in non-formal education goes hand-in-hand with a demand to deepen the common understanding of underlying concepts. QL-Youth centres, through their in-house educational staff and their hands-on experience in non-formal education, as well as their knowledge about the limitations and potentials of non-formal

education, are important instruments for knowledge development in non-formal education.

” QL-Youth centres have a specific educational offer, which complements formal education.

” QL-Youth centres, with their programme offers, respond to needs expressed by various stake-holders, not all of which are part of the youth sector.

” QL-Youth centres are laboratories for innovation in non-formal education.

Related criteria:

Criterion 4 : The centre has in-house educational staff working to support the activities.

Criterion 9 : The centre contributes to the development of the quality of youth work.

² “Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly 1437 (2000) on non-formal education”



QL-YOUTH CENTRES: MULTIPLIERS IN YOUTH WORK

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QL-Youth centres have the double function of delivering and inspiring. They contribute, through their facilities and through their programmes, to the personal and social development of the young. Through their example and standard-setting programmes, they motivate organisations and individuals involved in youth work.

Exchange amongst practitioners and development of knowledge

Our societies are undergoing rapid changes which particularly affect young people. Some enjoy the new opportunities, some suffer under the new challenges, but all of them react to the changes. Youth work has to adapt constantly and at a quick pace to new trends, the changing life-styles of the young and to the new opportunities or challenges they face. New arenas of work have to be identified and new approaches and instruments have to be developed in order to respond to upcoming needs.

One efficient way to identify emerging youth phenomena and needs is to be in permanent exchange with young people and youth workers. This exchange has to be organised, documented and shared in order to become knowledge. QL-Youth centres have the ambition of making a solid contribution to the development of knowledge on trends in youth and in youth work.

Training offers

Staff are a critical ingredient for quality in youth work. The quality depends heavily on the skills training of the staff to relate ef-

fectively to young people, understand their needs, develop and execute interesting activities for youth and help young people resolve issues between themselves and others. It is about the skills, knowledge and attitudes of youth workers. The significance of appropriate training for youth workers is gaining momentum, but the offer needs to be developed.

QL-Youth centres share their experience and knowledge through training courses or seminars in their specific domains, but also in the areas of human rights education, intercultural learning or education for democratic citizenship. Besides the content itself, these training courses help to create links between people and organisations and thus enhance sustainable networks and co-operation.

Documentation and publications

An effective way to ensure the exchange on the approaches and practice of the actors of the youth sector is to produce documentation of the knowledge gained through practice. Publications and educational materials are even necessary in order to consolidate concepts and knowledge. They are also important in terms of recognition, as they are a written proof that youth work adopts reflected approaches and has specific features.

QL-Youth centres can contribute, either through the production of their own training material or manuals, or at least through the dissemination of existing publications.

- ”** QL-Youth centres bring together knowledge of various stakeholders in youth work.
- ”** QL-Youth centres create sustainable networks.
- ”** Through the exceptional combination of space, programme, knowledge and networking, the QL-Youth centres are unique reference points for youth work.

Related criteria:

Criterion 4 : The centre has in-house educational staff working to support the activities.

Criterion 9 : The centre contributes to the development of the quality of youth work.



QL-YOUTH CENTRES: FOCAL POINTS FOR NETWORKING

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Each of the previously described pillars could be organised separately: residential facilities for youth work, educational programmes, and multiplying youth work practice do not need to be offered by the same structure and in the same place.

However, the combination of these aspects in one single place is an added value and creates ideal conditions for networking.

Ensure the involvement of young people

■ The QL-Youth centres take into account the situation and concerns of young people in the development of their programmes. They call on the expertise of young people, youth organisations, and structures that have specific competences to enrich the programmes delivered in their places. They develop tools to receive feedback and to ensure that young people are central in the design, development and delivery of activities that bring these centres to life.

Informal platform for networking

■ The youth sector is still small and scattered. It is characterised by a large diversity of concepts, actors, formats and scope of activities. Moreover, it has to deal with a significant turnover of the people involved. This is why it is even more necessary to have places where like-minded people can get together, exchange ideas and create bonds. QL-Youth centres provide such platforms and contribute to the identity of the youth sector. They play a similar role to those people involved in non-formal

education, such as libraries to writers, or community centres to villagers.

Platform for exchange between youth work practice and youth policy

■ Every QL-Youth centre has a mandate from public authorities and contributes to the realisation of the goals of national youth policy. This mandate recognises the central role that the QL-Youth centres play in responding to the wide ranges of needs of all young people and creating the opportunities for young people to fulfil their own potential.

Through the fact that QL-Youth centres combine different important attributes such as "be a space for young people", "be educational establishments" and "be multipliers", they are additional focal points of youth work and facilitate cross-sectoral co-operation, whether it is provided by public authorities, the local or national levels, the private sector or civil society, – and other sectors, including, for example, social care, health, sport, culture, formal education, employment services and juvenile justice. They are also a platform for fruitful exchange between the youth work practice and youth policy.

Involvement in regional and national networks

■ Most of the QL-Youth centres even reach out beyond the limits of their buildings as they organise activities and programmes in their region. Moreover,

through their infrastructure and staff, they are important players in the youth sector, and constants in a field characterised by many changes. They are therefore the privileged partners for co-operation projects at a regional and national level. On the one hand this participation in larger networks enriches the youth work practice at a local level, and on the other hand it ensures the centres have an impact beyond the limits of their buildings.

Involvement in European networks

QL-Youth centres are part of a network of centres sharing the same ideals. They participate in an annual platform meeting which is an opportunity to exchange experience and practices among centres, and continuously develop the quality of their offers. The network also allows for the development of bilateral or multilateral projects with similar centres, and, thanks to these, young people or youth workers can experience international co-operation.

The educational staff of QL-Youth centres participate in training courses in the field of human rights education, intercultural learning, education for democratic citizenship and global education. The QL-Youth centres have privileged access to consolidated knowledge about youth and non-formal education, notably through the impressive library of the Council of Europe's publications, elaborated by specialists from different fields and coming from a broad spectrum of countries.

” QL-Youth centres are ‘hot spots’ for people involved in youth work.

” QL-Youth centres are the backbones of the youth sector.

Related criteria:

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- Criterion 2:** The centre promotes international co-operation.
 - Criterion 3:** The centre has a clear mandate from public authorities.
 - Criterion 8:** The centre provides minimum infrastructure suited to international activities with diverse groups of participants.
 - Criterion 10:** The centre ensures the involvement of young people, youth organisations and associations in the development of their concepts and programmes.
 - Criterion 11:** The centre contributes to the orientation of youth policies.
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QL-YOUTH CENTRES: PROMOTING VALUES, APPROACHES AND STANDARDS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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Each QL-Youth centre has its own particular context and priorities, but they all share common values, approaches and standards. They are connected to the Council of Europe, an institution that has been committed to youth for over 50 years.

Share and promote the values of the Council of Europe

The QL-Youth centres are committed to the values of the Council of Europe which are described in the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law across Europe. They QL-Youth centres are regularly updated on the priorities of the youth policy in the Council of Europe and support these within their sphere of competence.

Share common approaches in quality development

The QL-Youth centres use the process of acquiring and maintaining the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres as a framework within which to develop the quality of their offer to young people and the youth sector at their own pace.

Inspired by established standards

The QL-Youth centres develop their quality on the basis of established standards for educational and policy approaches within the youth sector of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe provides the QL-centres with expert input in relation to the

conceptual and practical development of youth work and specific advice on the development of the infrastructural, managerial, administrative and educational quality.

” Participation in the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres ensures development of the quality of the offers of the centres.

Related criteria:

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- Criterion 12: The centre promotes the Council of Europe's values.
 - Criterion 13: The centre promotes the Council of Europe's programmes.
 - Criterion 14: The centre has transparent financial procedures and controlling mechanisms.
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Terminology and definitions

QL-Youth centre

■ By QL-Youth centre we mean youth centres which have already acquired the Council of Europe Quality Label for youth centres.

Non-formal education

■ We refer to the definition adapted from *Compass – A Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People* (2015):

Non-formal education refers to planned, structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational curriculum. Non-formal education is what happens in places such as youth organisations, youth centres, sports clubs and drama and community groups where young people meet. Non-formal education achievements are usually difficult to certify, even if their social recognition is increasing.

Non-formal education should also be:

- voluntary
- accessible to everyone (ideally)
- an organised process with educational objectives
- participatory
- learner-centred
- about learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship
- based on involving both individual and group learning with a collective approach
- holistic and process-oriented
- based on experience and action
- organised on the basis of the needs of the participants.

Youth work

■ We use the term “youth work” in a broad sense as defined in the “Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work”:

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision-making.

Non-formal education activities in QL-Youth centres are a specific type of youth work.

Youth Centres Awarded with the Quality Label

Country	Youth Centres	Labelled
Belgium	Destelheide Youth Centre www.destelheide.be	2016
Belgium	De Hoge Rielen Youth Centre www.dehogerien.be	2020
Bulgaria	Stara Zagora Youth Centre www.helpyouth-starazagora.com	2017
Bulgaria	Youth Centre Plovdiv www.youthcentre.plovdiv.bg	2018
Finland	Villa Elba Youth Centre www.villaelba.fi	2014
Finland	Marttinen Youth Centre www.marttinen.fi	2019
Germany	Foundation wannseeFORUM www.wannseeforum.de	2019
Ireland	EurÓg Killarney Youth Centre www.kdys.ie	2017
Luxembourg	Marienthal Youth Centre www.marienthal.snj.lu	2018
Portugal	Lisbon Youth Centre www.cjl.ipdj.pt	2015
Romania	Timisoara Youth House (FITT) www.fitt.ro	2016
Serbia	Ecocenter Radulovacki www.ekoloskicentar.org	2015
Slovenia	Brezice Youth Centre www.mc-brezice.si	2013
Spain	Euro-Latin American Youth Centre www.ceulaj.injuve.es	2016

Promoting Council of Europe values, youth policy and youth work standards in Europe

The Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres provides an opportunity for youth centres with a structured relationship to a public authority to benefit from the Council of Europe's approach to youth work and youth policy. It offers residential educational youth centres a framework within which to develop the quality of their offer to young people and the youth sector at their own pace.

This brochure describes the common understanding of what the quality-labelled youth centres stand for, what they stand for, what they should deliver and what their potential impact for society is. It describes these youth centres' function and their contribution to youth work.

The initiative 'The Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres' is part of the intergovernmental cooperation programme of the Council of Europe's youth sector.

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It includes 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

Council of Europe Publishing
<http://book.coe.int>
www.coe.int/youth

